

# GEORGIA'S REGIONAL PLANNING SYSTEM

AN EVALUATION OF THE STATE'S 12 REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONS

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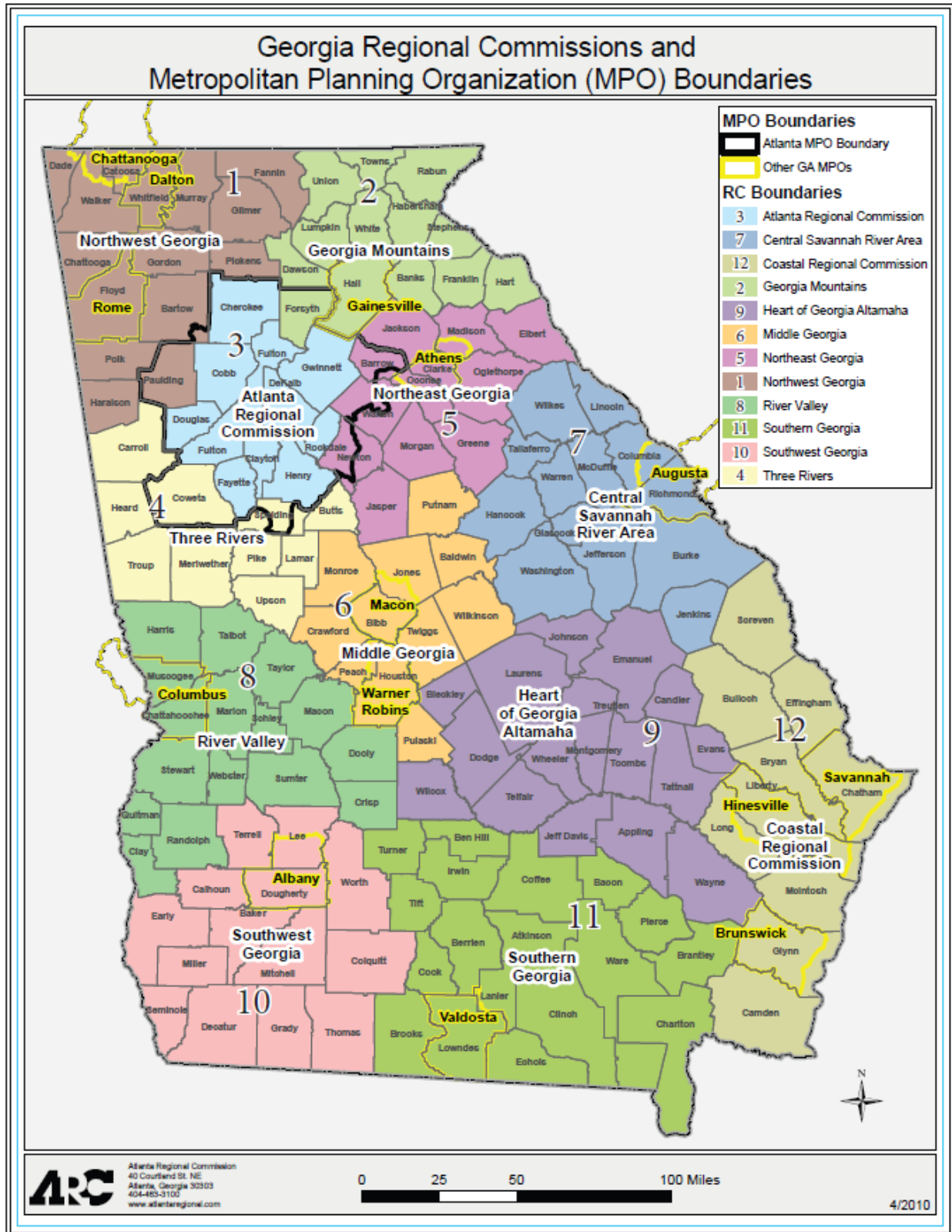


FIGURE 1: MAP OF REGIONAL COMMISSIONS, ARC

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACCG – Association of County Commissioners of Georgia

ARC – Atlanta Regional Commission

CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

CRC – Coastal Regional Commission

DA – Development Authority

DCA – Department of Community Affairs

CSRA-RC – Central Savannah River Area Regional Commission

GMRC – Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

HOGARC – Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission

JDA – Joint Development Authority

LCI – Livable Centers Initiative

MGRC – Middle Georgia Regional Commission

NADO – National Association of Development Organizations

NEGRC – Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

NWGRC – Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

OCGA – Official Code of Georgia Annotated

QLG – Qualified Local Government

RC – Regional Commission

RDC – Regional Development Commission

RVRC – River Valley Regional Commission

SGRC – Southern Georgia Regional Commission

SWGRC – Southwest Georgia Regional Commission

TRRC – Three Rivers Regional Commission

## INTRODUCTION

The State of Georgia is comprised of 12 regional commissions, each with their own rich history and agenda. They support local and county governments through the planning process, help address community-wide issues like accommodating aging populations, and provide workforce development opportunities. Under the Department of Community Affairs's (DCA) supervision, each region monitors business development and community growth occurring in each municipality and assists in planning efforts. The DCA then provides financial assistance to these communities through various grant funding and incentive programs. The regional commissions are in place to support Georgia's Planning Act of 1989 and assist communities in grant writing, business development, research, community surveys, mapping, housing development, building codes, and land use development strategies. While each commission identifies region-wide goals through the planning process, Georgia's status as a home rule state prevents all but one regional commission, the Atlanta Regional Commission, from enforcing these plans. This option paper is a survey of Georgia's regional development commissions, the elements of their comprehensive plans and community and economic development strategies, and an evaluation of their strategies to meet the goals identified in their plans. This is not a true evaluative analysis because the regional plans under evaluation are completed infrequently and at different intervals. Due to the often long period of time that passes between large comprehensive planning efforts, community planning values change drastically. Because each Georgia regional commission is so diverse in its geography, economic base, and community practices, a rigorous comparative analysis is difficult to perform. However, evaluating the type of

role that a planning commission assumes, whether it is as a consultant, an enabler, or community organizer, helps to identify the effectiveness of planning methods used within the region.

As part of the evaluation, this option paper will be identifying the types of planning approaches taken by each regional commission, as observed through each regional commissions' comprehensive plans and assessments, comprehensive economic development strategies, and implementation and action plans. The ideal planning efforts would include elements of recruitment (proactive) planning, impact (reactive) planning, contingency (interactive) planning, and strategic (proactive) planning. Evaluating regional commission plans through this framework helps to classify and categorize the breadth of planning strategies and goals stated by each agency, while monitoring the checkpoints in place to ensure that communities are working toward their previously identified goals. Besides identifying the previously mentioned elements, this paper will also examine if the regional planning process meets key planning values, sets planning priorities appropriately, and identifies possible funding mechanisms that would aid the regional commission in accomplishing community goals. To determine a planning commission's ability to meet these goals, I developed an ordinal scale and scoring criteria that evaluates internal and external characteristics of the agency's comprehensive planning efforts. Based on Berke's and Godshalk's "Searching for the Good Plan: A Meta-Analysis of Plan Quality Studies," the scoring values are not centered solely on business health and economic development but also on improving the quality of life for community residents by providing better housing opportunities, transportation access, and environmental resiliency. Other measures of good plans include a commission's ability to promote inter-governmental cooperation, as well as identify and facilitate partnerships between neighboring regional commissions. This paper is

meant to display the variety of planning efforts occurring across Georgia, which regions are effective in utilizing planning values to create regional change, and how the state can further support community development at a regional level.

## BACKGROUND OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES IN GEORGIA

Georgia has a long and complicated history with zoning law and planning regulation. In reaction to the Supreme Court's 1926 ruling on *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*, the Georgia Supreme Court issued a unique response, stating that zoning power is not an inherent police power of the State (as held by the U.S. Supreme Court), but that the power to zone should come only from an expressed Georgia Constitutional grant (Ga. Const. of 1877, art. III. §7, ¶25 (1927)). In 1966, the General Assembly introduced the County Home Rule Provision stating the following:

"The governing authority of each county is empowered to enact for unincorporated areas of the county appropriate planning and zoning ordinances for public safety, historic, health, business, residential, and recreational purposes. Such governing authority is hereby authorized to establish planning and zoning commissions separately or in conjunction with any combination of other counties and municipalities of this State and adjoining States. The General Assembly is hereby authorized to provide by law for such joint planning and zoning commissions and provide the powers and duties thereof. Such governing authority is hereby authorized to participate in the costs of such planning commission." (Johnston v. Hicks, 225 Ga. 576, 579 (1969))

The County Home Rule provision stripped the General Assembly's power to regulate in zoning and planning, and not until the early 1980's did the State clarify which governing body

would retain control. The 1983 Constitution, still the current State of Georgia Charter, clarified local control of zoning. Article IX, Section II, Paragraph IV Planning and Zoning: “the governing authority of each county and of each municipality may adopt plans and may exercise the power of zoning. This authorization shall not prohibit the General Assembly from enacting general laws establishing procedures for the exercise of such power.” (Ga. Const. art. IX, §2, ¶4) Certain broader powers are still left up to the state, including the control of “vital areas” (GA. CONST. art. III, § 6, ¶ 2(a)(1)), federal compliance (GA. CONST. art. III, § 6, ¶ 2(a)(3)), and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA). The 1983 constitutional amendments also restricted the General Assembly’s ability to empower local government’s growth management tools, with control coming from the State Constitution. Signed in to law in April 1985 as a response to rapid urbanization, the Steinberg Act became the first comprehensive zoning law to be passed in Georgia. The Act requires that agencies charged with the review of zoning proposals must investigate and make recommendations based on the proposal’s compliance with six criteria that act only as unenforceable guidelines:

- (1) Whether the zoning proposal will permit a use that is suitable in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby property;
- (2) Whether the zoning proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby property;
- (3) Whether the property to be affected by the zoning proposal has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned;



- (4) Whether the zoning proposal will result in a use which will or could cause an excessive or burdensome use of existing streets, transportation facilities, utilities, or schools;
- (5) If the local government has an adopted land use plan, whether the zoning proposal is in conformity with the policy and intent of the land use plan; and
- (6) Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use and development of the property which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the zoning proposal.

In 1989, The Georgia Planning Act was passed, with the goals of providing “a framework to facilitate and encourage coordinated, comprehensive state-wide planning and development at the local, regional, and state levels of government” (1989 Ga. Act 634, Synopsis). Some of the specific actions taken in this piece of legislature were to 1) empower the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to assist local governments in the preparation and implementation of comprehensive plans, established local area planning commissions as Regional Development Centers (RDC’s), and authorized the appropriate RDCs to “review local plans, point out conflicts, and force local government reconsideration of their plans” (Shelley et al, 2007). The sections of the Planning Act that authorize the RDCs to review and comment on local plans end with “nothing in this code section shall limit or compromise the right of the governing authority or municipality to exercise the power of zoning” (O.C.G.A. § 50-8-37(H)).

The Department of Community Affairs was created in 1977 as a division of the state government’s executive branch, and part of their duties to the State are to oversee the planning process for counties and municipalities to become qualified local governments. The DCA provides

additional details about RDCs roles and responsibilities and contracts annually with the RDCs for carrying out various activities related to implementing the Georgia Planning Act. The regional planning requirements fall under two broad categories, 1) Plan Scope and 2) State Planning Recommendations. A regional plan must also include three components: a Regional Assessment, a Stakeholder Involvement Program, and a Regional Agenda. The Regional Assessment is meant to be an objective assessment of data and information about the region, prepared without extensive stakeholder involvement. The Stakeholder Involvement Program details the RDC's strategy for ensuring adequate public and stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the Regional Agenda portion of the plan. The Regional Agenda includes the region's vision for the future as well as the strategy for achieving this vision. The State Planning recommendations "provide supplemental guidance to assist communities in preparing plans and addressing the regional planning requirements. The plan preparers and regional stakeholders must review these recommendations where referenced in the planning requirements in order to determine their applicability or helpfulness to the region's plan" (Shelley et al, 2007). In 2009, the state reconstituted the RDCs, combining 8 of the 16 RDC regions to form what is now 12 regional commissions (RCs).

With several regions consolidating agencies and resources over the last 15 years, as of 2019, there are 12 regional commissions. The DCA has created the Qualified Local Government Status, encouraging "local governments' engagement in comprehensive planning, Georgia incentivizes it by allowing cities and counties with DCA-approved comprehensive plans access to a special package of financial resources to aid in implementing their plans" (DCA, 2019). Qualified community objectives are "intentionally crafted with significant areas of overlap, such that, by

addressing one or more of the objectives, a community will also end up addressing aspects of others” (DCA, 2019). They include the following: economic prosperity, resource management, efficient land use, local preparedness, sense of place, regional cooperation, housing options, transportation options, educational opportunities, and community health. Each region of Georgia operates on a different comprehensive planning time table. Most of the RDCs undertake the activity every 5 years, with small annual plan updates, while many of the counties and municipalities they serve develop their comprehensive plans every 10 or 15 years. The Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A) creates the legal framework for the standards and procedures for regional planning. At the bare minimum, plans must include the following:

Plan Elements	Specifics at
Executive Summary	110-12-6-.03 (1)
Regional Goals	110-12-6-.03 (2)
Needs and Opportunities	110-12-6-.03 (3)
Implementation Program	110-12-6-.03 (4)
Appendices	110-12-6-.03(5)
SWOT Analysis	110-12-6-.03 (5)(a)
Analysis of Consistency with Quality Community Objectives	110-12-6-.03 (5)(b)
Data and Mapping Supplement	110-12-6-.03 (5)(b)
Stakeholder Involvement Report	110-12-6-.03 (5)(c)

TABLE 1. O.C.G.A., 2019. CHAPTER 110-12-6-.02 1

While all RDC plans include these elements, some have the resources to go above and beyond, developing in depth stakeholder involvement plans, surveys, outreach materials, and analytic tools. Planning methods vary across the state, and communication appears to occur predominantly within the region, and the DCA serves as the state monitoring authority, neither encouraging or discouraging the use of innovative planning methods. Even with this extensive capacity to provide government services and planning assistance, most of the state’s regional

commissions do not have the authority to enforce their plans, and Home Rule often allows county and local governments to go unchecked in their land use and community and economic development strategies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

As rural communities have tried to increase their economic base, researchers and practitioners have questioned what types of development are most successful and which factors lead to development success. Several researchers of economic development have distinguished between two economic development strategies: industrial recruitment and self-development (Eisinger, 1999; Flora et al., 1992; Sharp and Flora, 1999; Sharp et al., 2002). These two forms of economic development are often pitched against one another as opposing approaches to development, when in reality, communities can successfully implement both forms of economic development. In Leigh and Blakely's "Planning Local and Economic Development," the authors describe how multiple economic development planning approaches can work in conjunction with each other. In the responsive planning model, a preactive approach to planning, a community "initiates activities to build or maintain its economic base in response to competitive conditions" (Leigh and Blakely, 2017). The other responsive approach to planning is impact (reactive) planning. Impact planners wait until conditions have changed before responding to "the loss of the industrial base" (Leigh and Blakely, 2017). While planners can utilize either strategy, recruitment planning "is the most familiar style of local economic development planning" (Leigh and Blakely, 2017).

Industrial recruitment involves efforts to attract outside firms and industries to locate to the area (Sharp et al., 2002). These efforts include the provision of tax abatements, low-interest loans, and easy access to cheap land for infrastructure development. Crowe (2006) finds that

active civic organizations, community-wide fund-raising capacity, and the availability and control over natural surroundings have a significant positive effect on industrial recruitment. Sharp et al. (2002) find that the existence of active community organizations, businesses that support local community projects, community-wide fund-raising capacity, and extra-local linkages to peer communities and state government have a modest effect on industrial recruitment. Criticisms of industrial recruitment, such as the payment of low wages, short-term success, high recruitment costs (Loveridge, 1996), degradation of the local environment (Pellow, 2002), and possible increases in population growth, housing prices and rents (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Molotch, 1976, 1993), have led some communities to promote a second type of economic development: self-development. In contrast to industrial recruitment, self-development activities foster local businesses and other entrepreneurial activities along with relying on local resources to aid in development from within the community (Flora et al., 1992). Examples of self-development activities include revitalizing downtown businesses, promoting local tourism, and retaining or expanding locally owned businesses. Previous research shows that some community attributes foster self-development. Sharp et al. (2002) find that a social infrastructure rich in active community organizations, supportive businesses of local community projects, community-wide fund-raising capacity, and extra-local linkages to peer communities and state government is more likely to cultivate self-development than industrial recruitment. While self-development has some advantages over industrial recruitment, such as new jobs requiring higher skills and stronger job security, a higher number of jobs tend to be created from successful industrial recruitment endeavors than from self-development (Green et al., 1993; Sharp and Flora, 1999; Sharp et al., 2002).

Both forms of economic development have their advantages and disadvantages. It is up to each individual community to weigh the benefits and potential shortcomings when deciding on an economic development strategy. Georgia's planning system of regional commissions is dominated by rural development needs. "The community engaged in rural planning is usually territorial, that is, a small town, rural county or region, or other self-identified affiliation of place-based neighbors and collaborators in a rural setting" (Frank and Reiss, 2014). Competition over resources, labor, and social capital, and new environmental threats require communities to work together across jurisdictions.

## Resources

With rapid urbanization occurring at a global scale, rural communities are being drained of investment – economic, community services, infrastructure, and labor. There are two key resources that researchers seem to believe support rural economic development: financial resources and appropriate infrastructure (Ryser et al, 2010). With the tax bases of local governments diminishing due to the decline of industrial production, rural jurisdictions have had to take on an entrepreneurial nature in order to boost access to capital that supports new development options (Markey et al. 2005). Government timelines, priorities, and processes are requiring more time to complete, making it difficult to approve funding and develop cash flow, showing a need for rural government to diversify their sources of income support.

Infrastructure plays a major role in rural development, whether when attracting new industry or maintaining existing. The key infrastructure elements sought are housing and rental accommodation, energy/ power supply, transportation links, communications technology, quality of equipment, education facilities, and health, social, and retail services (Ryser et al.,

2010). Isolation plays a key role in the ability to make infrastructure investments. The more isolated the place, the more difficult it is to access “high-order services, legal information, political, and other organizational resources” (Ryser et al., 2010).

Another aspect of resource development is the ability of a community to mobilize resources in order to take collective action and make decisions that improve its economic health. Resource mobilization has two components: collective and individual investment for the common good. Individuals and firms are willing to contribute money, expertise, and labor directly to community projects (Flora et al., 1997). There is also a collective willingness of people to provide the government with resources to advance common efforts: community citizens are willing to invest in themselves through school bonds, public recreation programs, volunteer fire departments, and emergency squads. Mechanisms are in place to facilitate the participation of all in some way. Both individuals and institutions invest private resources. Loan/deposit ratios of banks and the availability of local equity capital are both important.

## LABOR

Owing to difficulties associated with training, recruitment, and retention, labor shortages exist across professions and sectors. Jobs are becoming increasingly professionalized and specialized (Ryser et al., 2010). Some resource sectors, such as forestry, mining, or oil and gas, have previously attracted low-skill / education workers into high paying jobs (Iverson and Maguire 2000). These same industries that now require more highly skilled labor and rural places often lack workers with appropriate skills to fill new positions (O’Hagan and Cecil 2007). As there is a greater demand for high-skilled labor, low-skilled workers must now pursue retraining opportunities at facilities often located in distant regional centers (Halseth and Sullivan 2003). As



a result, there have been more calls for distant learning opportunities and educational outreach programs in smaller places, as well as an increasing role for immigrant/migrant workers in the rural places (Han and Humphreys 2005). According to Leigh and Blakely, firms in today's economy need "highly skilled labor and are willing to pay for it" (Leigh and Blakely, 2017). The authors go on to say that "if the local human resource base is substantial, either new firms will be created [...] regardless of location" (Leigh and Blakely, 2017).

Drastic changes have been occurring in rural America. Agriculture, which once represented a primary income source for 25% of the rural population in the early 1970s, now represents the primary income source for only about 10% of the rural population (US Census, 2019). Due to the decline of the agriculture industry, development patterns have changed. The authors credit this to the absence of Federal policies for rural development, allowing states to create more specialized policy protections based on community needs. The presence of informal and formal social networks are the largest contributors to a rural community's economic health and rate of business development (Ring et al., 2009).

Many regional commissions have taken on a labor market intermediary role for the communities served. According to Brenner, there are three types of public sector intermediaries: the workforce development system which seeks to link disadvantaged workers to employment opportunities, an education-based institution that provides adult education and customized job training for employers, and a publicly-funded intermediary that engages in job training and placement activities (Brenner, 2003). Many of these can be seen in practice across Georgia, but many regional commissions are developing workforce development programs

within the commission. Workforce development is “the policies, programs, and institutions that assist workers and employers in connecting with one another, making future-oriented investments in labor force skills, and promoting career advancement and mobility toward goals of household, business and community, and regional economic prosperity (Schrock, 2014).

Workforce development across the state occurs in three capacities: employment and social policy, career and technical education, and organizations and human resource management.

Schrock claims that the diverse nature of this type of planning and development can be very difficult for planners looking to “define their substantive contributions and pints of connection”

(Schrock, 2014). For many regions, labor market intermediaries are crucial in providing

flexibility in a changing business environment, and workforce development initiatives can

support employer practices to “support high wages, skill formation, career advancement, and increasing productivity” (Schrock, 2013). They can help to promote a progressive vision of

communities and regions that reconcile growth with equity (Clark and Christopherson 2009).

Garmise presents the reality of workforce development in that it functions in a competitive marketplace. “Good intentions are insufficient to be a good intermediary: a good intermediary

must channel information in a way that lets it compete [...] and one-stops face an uphill battle

in fully developing this role, given the constraints they face” (Garmise, 2009).

## AMENITIES, TOURISM, AND NATURAL CAPITAL

Closely related to assets-based research is the role and contribution of ‘natural capital’ in rural economic development (Lorah and Southwick 2003). Natural capital refers to bio-physical assets including the landscape, wildlife, biodiversity, geology and soils, air quality, water quality, the availability of streams, rivers, ponds and lakes, as well as woods and forests (Martz and

Sanderson 2006). Many traditional rural economic developments (i.e. farming, forestry) are founded on such local natural capital and new business perceptions of natural capital opportunities are re-bundling assets to support additional economic value. According to Green, “communities need to develop strategies for improving the quality of jobs associated with amenities, especially tourism and recreation.”

Environmental justice is becoming a prevalent conversation topic in the State’s rural and regional planning process. Scholar David Pellow summarizes the issue, “as rural communities face threats associated with environmental injustice, extractivism, mining, pesticide drift, nuclear power, prison construction, hydroelectric dams, political and economic marginalization, and militarized state violence, it would appear that the integrity and future of rural spaces has never been at greater risk” (Pellow, 2016). The DCA requires regional commissions to identify some of these issues, but few commissions delve into the causes and possible mitigations required to improve the region’s environmental resources overall. Good regional planning efforts not only list the environmental threats to their communities but also identify goals and strategies to be implemented at the local level and monitored by the regional organization with a consistent check-in program as part of the strategy.

## SOCIAL CAPITAL

Results suggest that while natural capital positively impacts a community’s successful recruitment of outside industries, it is not significant for a community’s level of self-development. However, a community’s social infrastructure, measured by the existence of active civic organizations, local businesses that support local community projects, community-wide fund-raising capacity, and extra-local linkages to nearby communities, state, and national agencies,

positively affects both industrial recruitment and self-development (Crowe, 2006). Putnam (1993, pp. 35-36) states that social capital refers “to features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital.” James S. Coleman (1993, p. 9) says that such informal norms “depend on a dense and relatively closed social structure that has continuity over time.” Social capital thrives when individuals within a social system interact with one another in multiple roles over a period of time. “Only through interaction can trust reach sufficient levels to allow for the reduction of transaction costs” (Flora et al., 1997).

Many rural communities in the United States are economically depressed. However, while poor rural communities are geographically isolated and small, they are likely to be rich in social capital (Ring et al., 2009). In terms of quality of life, residents and businesses may be attracted to a rural place as a safe, clean environment where people want to raise children (Iverson and Maguire 2000). Scenery, outdoor amenities, and landscape features are also important for attracting residents and businesses (Richmond et al. 2000). Economic advantages associated with the low cost of living, abundance of cheap land, lower wages, and lower production costs can attract footloose capital and manufacturing activities (Argent et al. 2010). Some work highlights industries that may be attracted to rural places with less-stringent environmental and development controls (Harrington 2010). Communities save time and money by using existing assets instead of over investing in new ones that are untested.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The data for this research is compiled using publicly available plans and reports accessed through Georgia's Department of Community Affairs website and from the websites of each regional commission. While each regional commission's website has a fairly complete list of documents available, many sites contained broken links, and it was difficult to navigate sites in search of their planning documents.

As part of the data gathering process, I identified the executive directors and planning officials in each regional commission, rural development experts at the United States Department of Agriculture, Georgia Department of Economic Development, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Georgia Power, and several local level economic development leaders around the state. After creating an interview protocol, I set up phone interviews that would allow me to delve in to the following topics:

- How has the development agency changed over the last 30 years? How does this compare to what you know about statewide development strategies?
  - o What inter-regional activities have led to this change?
- How is the agency organized? Ex. Does it contain its own workforce development department or a team that focuses on aging?
- How would you describe inter-regional cooperation and competition?
- Since the regional plan was ratified, has there been a change in regional development strategies?
- How do you follow regional development initiatives occurring across the state?

- Do you think community and economic development activities are more successful at the local/ county, regional, or state level?

I then used both email and telephone to reach out to the regional and state development officials that I thought could best speak to the nature of my research. Over a two-month period, I was able to get a 20% response rate to my interview requests. Respondents included executive directors from the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, Southwest Georgia Regional Commission, River Valley Regional Commission, Georgia Mountain Regional Commission and employees of UGA Archways Program and Georgia Power's Economic Development department. Respondents were initially identified based on tenure in their respective agencies, and experience ranged from young professionals to experienced professionals with more than 30 years of experience. Those that had been in their agency for more than 10 years were more willing to speak to the types of regional development changes that have occurred over time, while others were more focused on their agency's ability to stand out at the state level.

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Several issues were consistently brought up during the interview process. Since Georgia is a home rule state, regional commissions have no authority to enforce planning program goals or create policy. Another frequently mentioned topic was the difficulty in guiding the planning efforts for so many counties and local municipalities, especially because they are frequently competing for resources and industry with each other. One interviewee identified the consolidation of local governments over the last ten years as being one of the most significant activities within their region. Consolidation has freed up community resources in order for government and locally based private partners to pursue new industry. Another major issue

identified by all regional plans and interviewees is the need for infrastructure improvements, particularly broadband access in rural areas and transportation system improvements (ranging from road improvements to transit). Both economic developers and planning officials identified a need to educate, not only local government elected officials, but also the general population on housing and transportation issues. Spatial mismatch between housing and employment opportunities is a growing issue for much of rural Georgia, and many local level officials and zoning officials are hesitant to introduce housing types other than single family residential into the existing housing stock. Amongst those interviewed, there was discord as to what level of government should address these issues. All agreed that the State would have the greatest agency in implementing policies and programming opportunities that would benefit local level planning goals, but many agreed that there was a disconnect between the state's capacity to act and the local level authority's willingness to address the issues identified by the state authority.

## ANALYSIS

### THE PLANS

While speaking with public officials and reviewing plans, it quickly became apparent that while each regional commission is acting as an extension of the Department of Community Affairs, each has its own unique set of challenges and goals for the next 30 years. Several themes stood out as being important topics across the state. The first being the importance of broadband for rural communities to remain competitive, not only with each other but also with their more urban neighbors. The second issue identified in all plans is the growth of online shopping and needed land use to accommodate this movement of goods and their delivery. As a third multi-regional issue identified in all plans, each region is in need of transportation investment, both in transit opportunities and infrastructure development. The fourth issue identified in all plans is the need for additional and diverse housing stock. One interviewee, Burke Walker of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, identified the need for denser multi-family development, and stated that the largest barrier to construction in his region was the general public's misconceptions about multi-family housing. He stated that in order for the development authority to meet the public's housing needs, there is a much needed educational component for commissioners, council members, and the general public on how this type of housing can both serve the community and be visually integrated into existing land use and design. Each region has its own unique issues and development styles, and the following section of this paper delves into the individual operations of each regional commission. The boards and councils of each commission is organized so that each county has three representatives. One member is an



appointed county commissioner, one is a mayor or councilperson of a city in that county, and the third member is a local business owner. Five additional seats on the board remain available for three governor appointees, one lieutenant governor appointee, and one speaker of the house appointee. As part of this analysis of regional commission plans, I'm primarily examining the state of the region's general comprehensive planning efforts, the goals identified through a variety of planning efforts, and whether the plans are more responsive or planning perspectives. The plans identified as strong plans will include the DCA's required planning elements, inter and intra-regional cooperation, and a mix of preactive, reactive, proactive, and interactive planning methods used within the regional commission's communities.

#### EVALUATION CRITERIA AND SCORING

To evaluate the planning process of each regional commission, the evaluation and scoring methods are based on Berke's and Godschalk's *Searching for the Good Plan: Meta-Analysis of Plan Quality Studies* and William Baer's *General Plan Evaluation Criteria: An Approach to Making Better Plans*. Both articles include extensive evaluations of the contents of comprehensive plans. Baer notes the importance of evaluating post hoc plan outcomes, but states that "they never show how much time should elapse before the full effects of the plan should be evaluated." (Baer, 1997).

Berke and Godschalk's piece *Searching for the Good Plan: Meta-Analysis of Plan Quality Studies* takes Baer's work further by setting two evaluation types: 1) internal plan quality "that includes the content and format of key components of the plan (e.g., issues and vision statement, fact base, goal and policy framework, implementation, monitoring) needed to guide land use in the future" and 2) external plan quality that "accounts for the relevance of the scope and

coverage to reflect stakeholder values and the local situation to maximize use and influence of the plan” (Berke and Godshalk, 2009).

### Internal characteristics

*Issue identification and vision:* Description of community needs, assets, trends, and future vision

Assessment of major issues, trends, and impacts of forecasted change

Description of major opportunities for and threats to desirable land use and development

A vision that identifies what the community wants to be

*Goals:* Reflections of public values that express desired future land use and development pattern

Statements of future desired conditions that reflect breadth of community values

*Fact base:* Analysis of current and future conditions and explanation of reasoning

Present and future population and economy

Existing land use and land supply, and future land demands for various uses (e.g., housing, commercial, industrial, public facilities)

Existing capacity and future demand for public infrastructure

State of natural environment resources and constraints

Clear maps and tables that support reasoning, and enhance relevance and comprehensibility

*Policies:* Specification of principles to guide public and private land use decisions to achieve goals

Sufficiently specific (not vague) to be tied to definite actions

Spatial designs that specify future land use, infrastructure, transportation, and open space networks that are sized to accommodate future growth

*Implementation:* Commitments to carry out policy-driven actions

Timelines for actions

Organizations identified that are responsible for actions

Sources of funding are identified to supporting actions

*Monitoring and evaluation:* Provisions for tracking change in community conditions

Goals are based on measurable objectives, e.g., 40 percent of residents within a quarter mile of transit stop

Indicators of objectives to assess progress, e.g., annual percentage of residents within a quarter mile of transit stop

Organizations identified responsible for monitoring

Timetable for updating plan based on monitoring of changing conditions

*Internal consistency:* Issues, vision, goals, policies, and implementation are mutually reinforcing

Goals must be comprehensive to accommodate issues and vision

Policies must be clearly linked back to goals and forward to implementation actions

Monitoring should include indicators to gauge goal achievement and effectiveness of policies

#### External characteristics

*Organization and presentation:* Provisions to enhance understandability for a wide range of readers

Table of contents, glossary of terms, executive summary

Cross referencing of issues, vision, goals, and policies

Clear visuals, e.g., maps, charts, and pictures, and diagrams

Supporting documents, e.g., video, CD, Web page

*Inter-organizational coordination:* Integration with other plans or policies of public and private parties

Vertical coordination with plans or policies of federal, state, and regional parties

Horizontal coordination with plans or policies of other local parties within or outside local jurisdiction

*Compliance:* Consistent with the purpose of plan mandates

Required elements are included in plan

Required elements fit together

Using this criteria, each plan will evaluate the internal and external characteristics of each regional planning commission's documents. Each characteristic will be equally weighted and graded on an ordinal scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest score of a plan's ability to address the listed characteristic. With ten total types of internal and external characteristics, the highest score for a regional commission to receive would be 50 points.

#### Ordinal Scale

1	Plan does not address this characteristic.
2	Plan mentions this characteristic, but does not address goals or strategies to improve the issue
3	Plan addresses characteristic, makes a minimal effort to create goals, but does not create a monitoring program to ensure that the action plan is mitigating the issue.
4	Plan addresses the characteristic, develops strategies to mitigate the issue by identifying goals and creating an action plan
5	Plan fully addresses characteristic, develops strategies to mitigate the issue, identifies goals, creates an action plan for the issue, and has planned check-ins to monitor the progress of the previously created strategies.

## REGION 1 | NORTHWEST GEORGIA (NWGRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The NWGRC's board is comprised of three representatives hailing from each respective county. The responsibilities of the Regional Commission include the following: (1) implementation of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989; (2) administration of the Area Agency on Aging; (3) administration of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; and (4) providing planning and development assistance



FIGURE 2. NWGRC COUNTIES

to member governments in areas they could not otherwise afford (NWGRC, 2019). The staff is separated into seven key groups: Executive, Community and Economic Development, Administrative Services, Planning, workforce, GIS/ Information Technology, and the largest, the Area Agency on Aging.

### REGIONAL STATUS

With a population of 890,000 people, the Northwest region of Georgia is anticipating a population increase of 27% over the next 35 years. Self-identifying as the “industrial belt” of Georgia, NWGRC's industry is comprised of carpet and flooring, automobile, and tire manufacturing. The region contains many pockets of concentrated poverty, and development officials and local leaders are concerned with creating development opportunities that help build

up these type of communities. As a region, design goals have been put in place to favor the preservation of existing natural resources, while emphasizing low impact development methods such as conservation design subdivisions with design features that support water infiltration and recharge. As of August 2018, the Georgia Port Authority opened a new inland Appalachian Regional Port in Crandall to “connect the mid-south to the world” (GPA, 2018). With the inland port’s creation, new concerns have begun to surface within the community, particularly related to how existing road capacity can accommodate more freight vehicles and how there is a growing need for industrial and commercial development. Proposals to the community primarily involve creating designated truck routes and encouraging industrial growth along existing commercial highways. Leadership has stated that they would like to avoid creating any sort of new regulations that prohibit new industrial development all together, and focus resources on land development strategies that protect the existing agricultural land and natural resources (NWGRC, 2019).

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission has begun the process to update their 2013 plan. Unlike previous planning efforts, much of this plan focused on housing availability and transportation systems. The DCAs inclusion of these topics in the O.C.G.A have forced communities to examine these often overlooked aspects of their community and to take a look around at

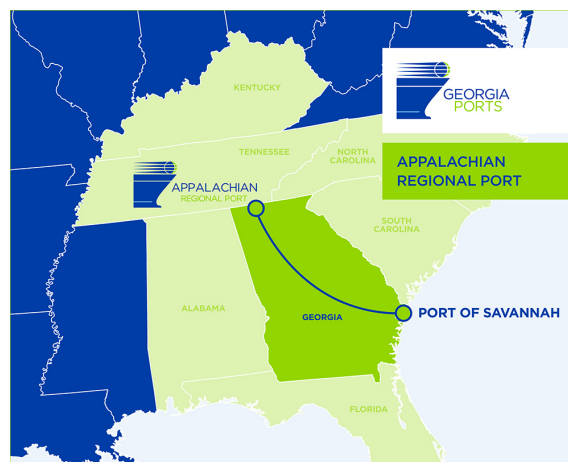


FIGURE 3. APPALACHIAN REGIONAL PORT MAP

neighboring regions to see how their region fits into a larger, state-wide, vision. The NWGRC is one of the four plans in the state that include a bicycle and pedestrian transportation component. The plan also bridges the transportation component to improving access to regional natural

resources to help build tourism activity. With the creation of the Appalachian Regional Port, local officials would like to address the influx of commercial traffic and congestion. To do this, they have asked the community to prioritize either creating designated truck routes, restricting transient truck traffic on residential streets, controlling commercial and industrial growth near the existing commercial route, and/or creating regulations that prohibit new industrial or commercial development.

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The 2012 NWGRC Regional Assessment identifies issues and opportunities for the plan and includes all of the required elements, as stipulated by the DCA. Each section identifies the existing state of the region, what kind of development is intended, and how that fits into larger regional goals. However, it does not provide additional strategies that are needed to complete those stated goals. As part of the planning process, NWGRC created a survey that was distributed throughout its cities and counties. One component of the survey that stands out is its addressment of job retention in the region. The survey asks if leadership should invest in technical colleges, industrial parks, tax incentives for developers, and/or to invest in local community assets such as parks and downtowns to create a “sense of place” for citizens and workforce. Public feedback also identified two issues that are prevalent in every plan across all twelve regional districts of Georgia: the importance of broadband and the changing nature of how communities are shopping.

## PLAN EVALUATION AND SCORE

Using the scale to score NWGRC's planning efforts, the comprehensive plan assessment and economic development strategy received a total score of 35 out of 50 points. While the NWGRC plan includes the required DCA material, it does not address inter-regional cooperation. It does include elements of recruitment planning strategies that complement some of the state's larger industry goals for the region, most of the plan is reactive. The plans

NWGRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	3
Goals (1-5)	4
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	3
Implementation (1-5)	3
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	2
Internal Consistency (1-5)	3
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	3
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	2
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>33</b>

TABLE 2. NWGRC'S SCORECARD

are available online, on both the commission's and DCA's websites are dated, having been completed in 2012. There is no clear action plan for the region, only a comprehensive list of issues, with no strategic way to address those issues. For improvement in the planning process, the NWGRC should work toward updating their plans more frequently. With additional coordination efforts, the agency has the potential to improve inter-agency cooperation and developing a region specific vision will improve internal consistency.



## REGION 2 | GEORGIA MOUNTAINS (GMRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The GMRC's board has a very similar breakdown compared to the NWGRC. The staff of GMRC is divided into two main groups. The first group consists of the core GMRC operations, which includes executive staff, an economic development department, a planning department, and information services. The second grouping of staff is much larger than the general GMRC staff and comprises the Workforce arm of the GMRC. The Workforce Georgia

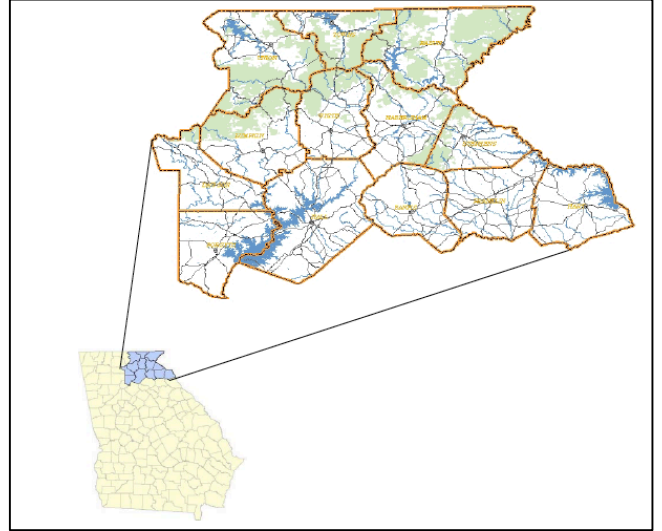


FIGURE 4. MAP OF GMRC

Mountains staff are divided into the following subject matter areas: adult/DW, youth, mobile training unit, and administration.

### REGIONAL STATUS

The Georgia Mountain region is facing a population increase of over 30% in the next five years, and it could arguably be described as the region with the least amount of developable land across the state, due partially to the mountainous topography of the region and the prevalence of National Forest land. Due to the rapid growth, the GMRC has focused many of its resources into taking an inventory of local housing programs and policies in each community within their jurisdiction. To help build housing options, the regional commission and their partners at North Georgia Technical College's economic development division have begun to talk to industrial

mainstays in the region about developing on-site workforce housing options. Close proximity to Atlanta drives most of the region's community and economic development decisions.

GMRC devotes a lot of time and attention to the area's natural resources, especially the protection of Lake Lanier, Georgia's largest water reservoir. The regional commission only oversees a portion of this maintenance and support, and the State and US Army Corps of Engineers maintain control of the lake and set rules relating to its operation. Georgia Power has a very strong regional presence in North Georgia due to operations on Lakes Burton, Seed, Rabun, Tugaloo, Yonah, and Tallulah Falls. These lakes provide a major tourism boom to the region in the Summer and Fall seasons, and part-time residents more than double the population for many north Georgia cities and counties. Former UGA Archway Partnership representative and current economic developer for the Rabun County Development Authority, Rick Story states that the region's natural beauty and outdoor amenities are what drive the area's retail trade, accommodation, and food service industries. With improved access to outdoor resources, the Georgia Mountain region has seen a somewhat successful turnaround of their historic downtowns. In Gainesville, Toccoa, Clayton, and Clarksville, local investment in the downtown core and a public push to change local blue laws have created popular destinations and experiences for locals and tourists alike. With the increase of tourism in these towns, there is a growing need to transportation accessibility and a rural transit plan that partners with neighboring regions.

## PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The 2017 GMRC plan includes all of DCA's required elements, but includes several sections that aren't as prevalent in other regional plans, such as telecommunications, energy, and Georgia's growing film industry. As a part of the plan, the agency created a system of monitoring activities and evaluation procedures that will be examined annually. As part of the evaluation procedures, the board developed "minimum" and "excellence" standards, as well as a reporting system to share performance evaluations. According to Story, this analysis and reporting method allows for local governments to examine their available resources in a more expedient manner, and shift priorities toward more attainable goals.

## PLAN EVALUATION AND SCORE

The GMRC scored 43 out of 50 points, scoring relatively high on all internal and external criteria. Though it is not evident in the scoring characteristics, GMRC does a good job of working with external agencies, in particular the Appalachian Regional Commission, to help improve local development capacity. The GMRC has created a stand-alone document that consists of their Regional Implementation Program, and updates the document annually as part of their strategy. The regional implementation program is organized by key

GMRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	4
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	5
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	4
Internal Consistency (1-5)	4
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	4
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>44</b>

TABLE 3. GMRC'S SCORECARD

planning topics (land use, natural resources and environmental protection, transportation, infrastructure improvements, economic development, workforce development, housing, and

disaster preparedness). The plan consists of a large table, organized by the main priority and sub-strategies that need to be performed in order to complete that priority. The plan lists each action, the partners needed, whether the task is a short-term or long-term goal, the status of the project, and the amount of funding available for the task. This appears to be an effective planning measure, because there is an annual check-up and multiple partnerships in place to help implement the strategies created by GMRC.

Priority/ Strategy	Action	Partners	Short-Term (1-5 yrs)	Long-Term (6-10 yrs)	Ongoing
<i>Priority: To conserve, protect and promote the environmental, natural and cultural resources of the region.</i>					
NR1: Promote conservation design ideas and other best management practices for new development.	Encourage adoption of conservation design standards and conservation easements	DNR, DCA, Local Govts.	1-3 yrs. \$10,000	-	-
NR2: Improve and promote the knowledge of existing historic resources and preservation programs.	Update NHARGIS and regional inventory; Share with communities	DNR, DCA, Local Govts.	2-4 yrs. \$50,000	-	-
	Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources; Place on the web				
NR3: Support efforts to implement the State's River Basin Management Plans.	Continue to work with/for the 3 Water Planning Councils	DNR, DCA, Local Govts.	-	-	Program policy
NR4: Promote tighter coordination between land use planning and water supply management.	Develop tool for tracking impact of new development on local water supplies	DNR, DCA, Local Govts.	-	4-6 yrs. \$10,000	-

TABLE 4. EXAMPLE OF GMRC'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The plan also includes a small summary of inter-regional projects, and how each local government can support the larger regional priority. The role of the GMRC is that of a consultant, providing much needed planning services to very rural communities, while also organizing them in a manner that encourages them to work together in order to achieve common goals.

## REGION 3 | ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION (ARC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

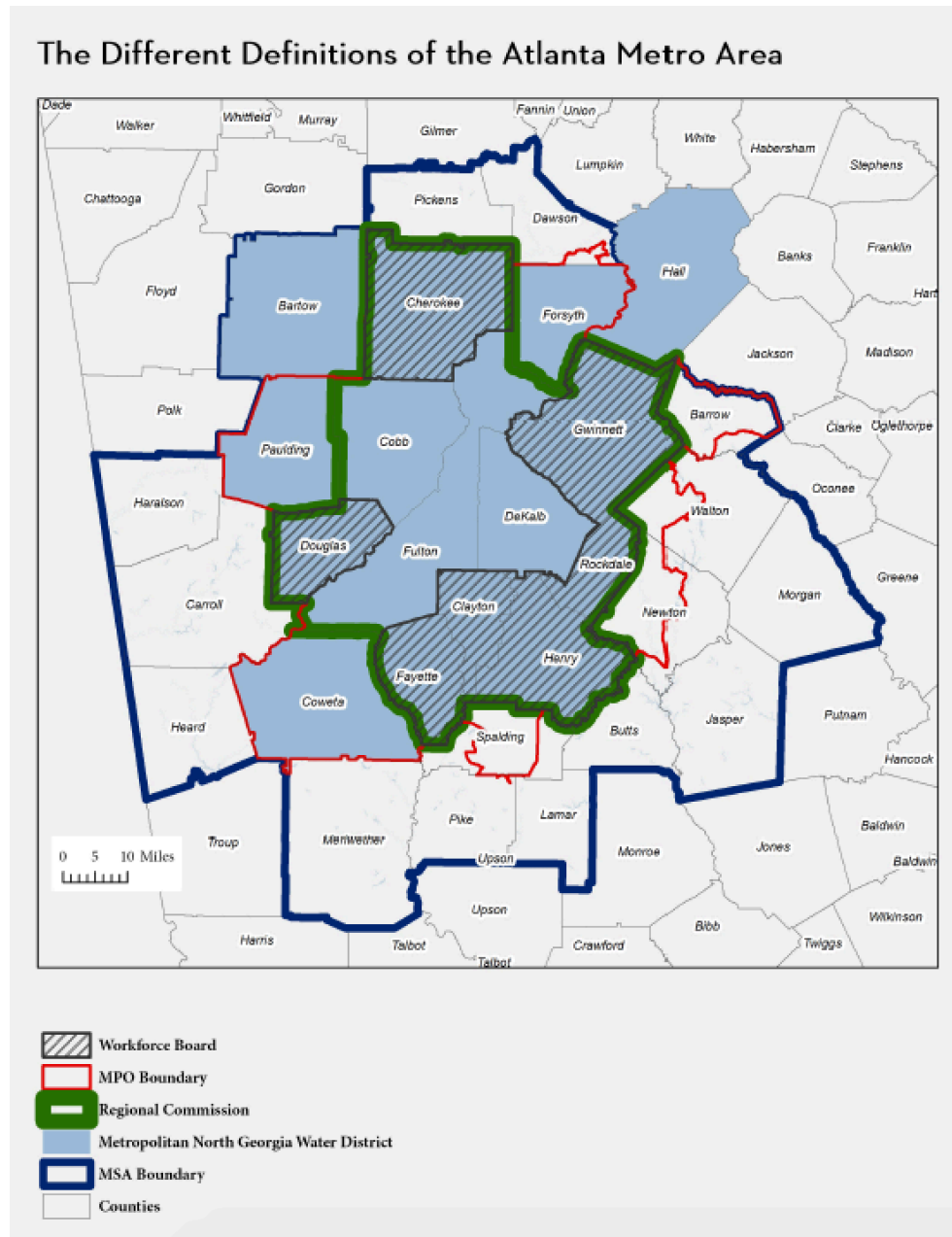


FIGURE 5. MAP OF THE ARC

The largest and most powerful regional development commission in the state is the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). Designated as the Metropolitan Planning Organization

(MPO) under the Federal Highway Act and Georgia law, this region is able to assign and meet planning goals very differently than the rest of the state's regional development agencies. Because of these designations under both Federal and State law, the ARC is classified as a Metropolitan Planning and Development Commission, and as such, is able to separate itself from other regional development organizations because they have the legal authority to enforce planning provisions. Because of this heightened control, many municipalities and counties see the benefit of joining the ARC. The board is comprised of the following:

- The county commission chair from each of the 10 member counties
- The mayor and a council member from the region's largest city (City of Atlanta)
- One mayor from each of the 10 member counties, with the exception of Fulton, which has two mayoral representatives (one from north Fulton and one from south Fulton)
- A representative from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs
- 15 citizen members who are selected by the ARC board's elected officials. ARC citizen member district map

Staffing at the ARC includes almost 200 employees, covering topics like transportation, community engagement, land use coordination, and natural resource management. With over 19 boards and committees overseeing regional planning and development, the ARC is able to serve the largest region in the state. Because of their federal designation as an MPO, the ARC has more extensive guidelines for compliance than any other part of the state, and require staff with the expertise to meet these requirements.

## REGIONAL STATUS

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) undoubtedly has the most government resources at their disposal and are able to operate very differently than most of the other regional commissions in the state. By being the densest region in the state, ARC is capable of offering more services than any other regional development agency, serving as a regional advocate for community services and development opportunities. Like many other regional development authorities, the ARC has created a list of what they view as the top 10 challenges facing the Atlanta metro area for the next 50 years. Like most of the rural parts of the state, they have identified challenges to address for the next 50 years, but unlike the rest of the state, several of the challenges are unique for the region. Half of the challenges identified relate to transportation and the need to accommodate new technology in the infrastructure system. Many rural regional development agencies have identified emerging technologies related to transit as issues to watch, rural communities are not currently considering the implications of connected and automated vehicle technology, the increase of e-commerce, and increased freight traffic. One of the biggest challenges that the region is looking to address is the ability to implement transit funding across multiple jurisdictions.

## PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Because of their considerable resources, the ARC has the most comprehensive website resources. Easy to access public data allows the agency to maintain a degree of openness that most other regional commissions within the state are unable to provide. Not only does the ARC offer the required planning documents as stipulated by the DCA, they have the resources to

create in-depth plans on topics ranging from arts and culture to water supply and conservation. Because of the agency's federal status as an MPO, the ARC is able to enforce the plans and strategies identified through their planning efforts.

#### PLAN EVALUATION AND SCORE

The ARC employs a very holistic approach to its planning efforts leading to a perfect score. Of course small improvements could always be made, but the agency works to fully address the broadest range of issues in the state. The agency has created a plan that not only identifies region wide goals, but also has created multiple schedules that monitor each goal and how they align with a local-level community's vision. The comprehensive plan uses responsive and strategic

ARC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	5
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	5
Implementation (1-5)	5
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	5
Internal Consistency (1-5)	5
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	5
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	5
Compliance (1-5)	5
Total Score (out of 50)	50

TABLE 5. ARC'S SCORECARD

planning strategies to develop a region-wide action plan, making it a very effective and readable plan. The ARC has gone beyond just listing key regional goals and strategies and have created the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) to help the local governments it serves meet community needs. While the planning documents broadly describe the regions goals and strategies, implementing programming to address smaller scale planning issues shows how the ARC acts as a consultant, an enabler, and a community organizer.



## REGION 4 | THREE RIVERS (TRRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

Located in the central-west part of the state, the Three Rivers Regional Commission focuses on aging services, workforce development, transportation, and local/regional planning. The agency's staff is organized by five divisions, the largest being the aging department. The second largest



FIGURE 6. TRRC AREA

department is WorkSource Three Rivers, the workforce development program for the region. The last three departments are fairly small and consist of administrative and financial services, government services, and the planning department. Non-public members of the board represent various careers and involvement with local government, but many currently serve, or have served, in a local economic development capacity.

### REGIONAL STATUS

While the northern regions of Georgia are experiencing population booms, middle Georgia is noticing a population loss, especially in rural areas. The Three Rivers region encompasses only 10 counties in middle/west Georgia and is experiencing many of the same increasing poverty and unemployment rates that are occurring around the state. With a steep decline of the local textile industry, communities are looking for new industry to support. Low housing stock and limited job opportunities are causing many of the 18-25-year-old age

demographic to leave in search of better opportunities. The Kia motor plant is the largest employer in the region and offers job training opportunities, but the rapid growth has further strained the region's ability to provide adequate housing. Heritage preservation is an important resource for the Three Rivers area, especially because of the location of historic Warm Springs on the Southern boundary of the region.

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The plan includes all of the DCA's required elements, including some traffic analysis and a traditional SWOT analysis. Outlined in the plan are a set of regional goals, with strategies to meet those goals, and a small, one page, plan of action to meet those goals. The plan of action identifies the public partners needed, as well as a list of priorities organized by county. The performance measures of each project is organized by human factors, local assets, necessary infrastructure, and business environment.

#### IS THIS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN?

The TRRC scored 37 out of 50 points, with its lowest score in "monitoring and evaluation." The TTRRC has a somewhat effective plan because it lists regional goals and strategies, but there is not a system in place to regularly check-in with projects and update the plan with changed statuses. Many of the strategies are too broad to see a clear impact at the local level. The plan is also inconsistent in identifying funding sources and partnerships that would be needed to see the strategy implemented.

TRRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	3
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	3
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	2
Internal Consistency (1-5)	3
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	3
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
Total Score (out of 50)	37

TABLE 6. TRRC'S SCORECARD

## REGION 5 | NORTHEAST GEORGIA (NEGRC)

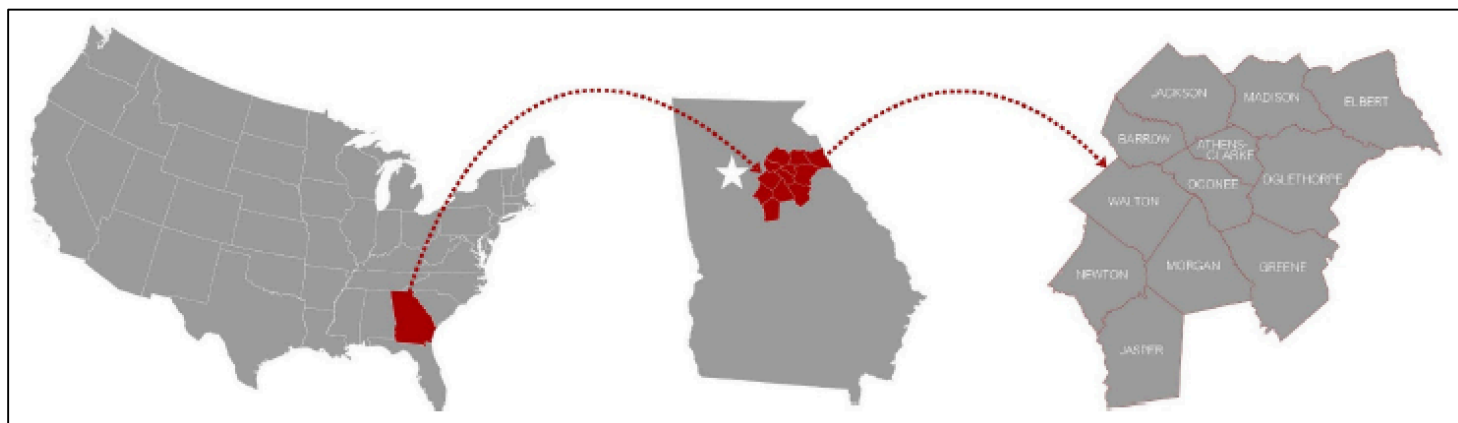


FIGURE 7. MAP OF NEGRC

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission council includes public representatives from both the county and cities, as well as private sector representatives. Like many other regional commissions, the private sector individuals are community or economic development personnel representing metro chambers or are retired from public service and now maintain business interests within the region. The NEGRC council also holds seats for council associates, many of them retired school board members, and staff committee assignments. The council is organized into the following committees: audit and finance, personnel, planning and government services, and program of work. NEGRC is organized into aging, planning and government services, workforce development, and administration, with most of the staff devoted to either the aging division or the workforce development division.

### REGIONAL STATUS

NEGRC is located in Athens-Clark county, and has many of the University of Georgia's resources at its disposal. Because it is a predominantly rural region, community and economic

development is focused around UGA and agri-business research and development opportunities. With Interstate 85 bisecting the region, most industrial land use and warehousing is confined with a several mile buffer around the highway. According to Burke Walker, the Director of Planning and Government Services, the rural parts of NEGRC are experiencing rapid population declines, “many of our counties are struggling with youth retention,” and during the community engagement process, the NEGRC council identified this topic as something to explore (Walker, 2019). The commission is one of the few in the state that has developed a program that focuses on workforce development opportunities for the region’s youth, identifying housing opportunities and possible government partnerships with private companies that would entice them to stay within the area.

Another issue not identified in the plan, but mentioned by Walker, is the southern part of the region’s development potential. He called I-20 “the last undeveloped corridor of metro Atlanta” and that the NEGRC was in the process of supporting new industry that is looking to locate in that area. Newton County has constructed an industrial park in partnership with several of its neighboring counties, hoping to capitalize on Atlanta’s eastern expansion.

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The NEGRC relies heavily on local community partners to share the regional commission’s mission and how their services fit within the larger community and economic development context. The region maintains and regularly updates the CEDS document, which includes demographic information by county and action items that serve the region at large. For each action item, multiple strategies are listed that include that tasks that need to be competed to

reach this goal and the performance measures that will be used by NEGRC council and staff to determine successful goal completion. The CEDS document clearly ranks the region's action items and goals, and annual plan updates allow for staff to examine the progress and performance of these action items, and whether additional resources are needed to help push this priority to completion.

#### PLAN EVALUATION AND SCORE

With a score of 45 out of 50, the NEGRC's implementation plan is very concise, while addressing multiple planning issues. Though there are only a few key priorities identified for the region, each priority is listed with several sub-goals that must be addressed in order to successfully improve the planning issue identified. The plan uses clear graphics and to communicate the

NEGRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	4
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	4
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	5
Internal Consistency (1-5)	4
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	5
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>45</b>

TABLE 7. NEGRC'S SCORECARD

priority and how it will impact the region at large. The role of the agency is very clear in planning documents, and the NEGRC serves as both a consultant and enabler for communities to accomplish their goals and objectives.

Goal Types NEGRC	Does the plan identify partners?	Does the plan set a time limit?	Are the performance measures clearly identified?	Does the plan identify funding mechanisms or estimated costs?
Increase Public Information and Marketing	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Encourage local entrepreneurs (proactive - increase new indigenous firms)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Foster a skilled and dedicated workforce	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Face environmental threats	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

TABLE 8 EXAMPLE OF NEGRC'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN COMPONENTS

## REGION 6 | MIDDLE GEORGIA (MGRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Middle Georgia Regional Commission council is comprised of five representatives from each county within the district. Each county is represented by a commissioner, a municipal member, a non-public member, and two additional associate members. The associate members of each county either currently, or previously, hold public office or represent a local development authority. The commission is organized into six departments,

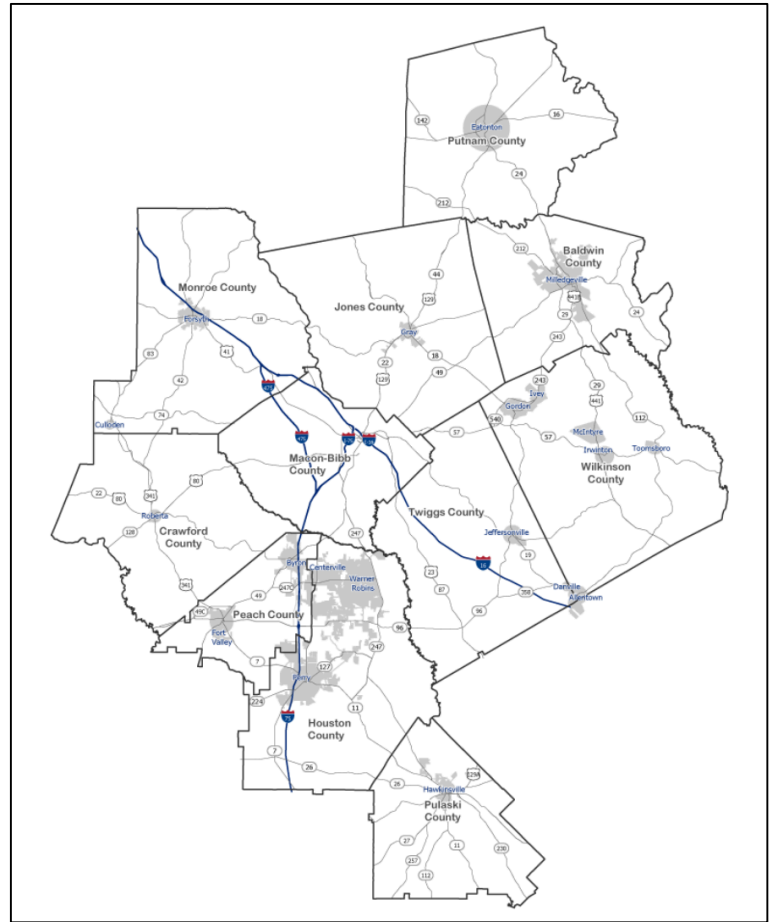


FIGURE 8. MAP OF MGRC

administration, the area agency on aging,

finance, public administration/ planning/ and economic development, technology services, and workforce development. The largest of these departments is the area agency on aging, which offers extensive aging and disabilities counseling assistance.

### REGIONAL STATUS

A large part of MGRC's plan is based around connecting a skilled workforce with quality jobs, sustaining Robins Air Force Base, and developing the freight and logistics industry. Middle Georgia Regional Commission serves 11 counties and approximately 500,00 people. They only

expect to grow by 20% over the next 35 years, with growth concentrating in more urban and suburban counties (like Houston, Jones, and Monroe). The aging workforce is starting to drain the supply of qualified and skilled workers. With wage levels well below average of the state's standard, the more rural counties in the region are experiencing much greater rates of poverty and unemployment, and while the regional authority recognizes this issue, few plans have been made to help build opportunity. Robins Air Force base is the region's largest employer, and local community and economic developers want to capitalize on the base's location and continue to build out business incubators and fabrication labs to sustain the region's growing defense industry. However, Middle Georgia has been losing defense contracts to out-of-region industries and the region fears BRAC (base realignment and closure) and the impact it would have on the vitality of Middle Georgia. While the comprehensive plan makes note of the region's capacity for innovation, it also identifies a barrier to growing industry. One of "the region's deficiencies is its low index score for business dynamics. Most significantly, this involves a lack of venture capital flowing through the region and a lack of 'churn' among businesses that can lead to creative new establishments. In other words, businesses in Middle Georgia tend to be stagnant, with a lack of entrepreneurial activities that can lead to improvements among businesses practices" (Middle Ga CED, 2017).

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The plan follows a typical SWOT analysis outline for each of the DCA's required plan elements. It also includes an implementation program for each problem identified in the planning process, and most are very general concepts that the regional commission would like to see

promoted at the local level. The comprehensive plan lays out detailed charts of proposed and existing development activities occurring across the region, the time frame for the listed project's completion, the estimated cost, funding sources, the responsible parties, and any possible issues and opportunities that that project address, as identified in earlier chapters of the plan's SWOT analysis. The CEDS document presents evaluation strategies and how each goal should be measured. "The ability to take these actions varies greatly from one community to the next, but the commitment of local match is a precursor to nearly all large-scale economic development projects. The extent to which grants are awarded within the Middle Georgia region, including the leveraging of local funds, is another prime indicator of success" (Middle Ga CED, 2017).

#### PLAN EVALUATION AND SCORE

The MGRC's score is 37 out of 50 points. The agency does not have a regional action plan, but instead, lists planning priorities and projects by city and county. There seems to be an unwillingness at the local level to share resources and work together. Each project is given a very loose goal and strategy, and the regional plan lists broad evaluation strategies, like using statistical measures and capacity measures, to see if the counties

MGRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	3
Goals (1-5)	4
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	3
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	3
Internal Consistency (1-5)	4
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	3
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	3
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>37</b>

TABLE 9. MGRC'S SCORECARD

were able to meet their identified goals. This does not appear to be an effective way to ensure that goals are being met and that localities have the support needed to complete their "special projects."





losing many of trained youth. Much of the comprehensive plan and the CEDS highlights the importance of Fort Gordon, and the community's need to develop industry that support the military base. One industry experiencing a lot of growth in the CSRA is cyber security and Cyberspace Operations, Signal/Communications Networks and Information Services, and Electronic Warfare. Many regional technical colleges are partnering with the base to increase civilian training in these programs, and much of the CSRA CEDS is dedicated to analyzing and promoting this type of economic cluster.

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Subtopics of the plan are organized by "needs" and "opportunities," and a more traditional SWOT analysis is included in the appendices. The regional comprehensive plan was completed in November of 2018 and is focused on land use development, community facilities, and natural resources. The CEDS update was released around the same time and provides more in depth demographic data and economic trends of the region. The comprehensive plan is divided into three sections covering regional goals, regional needs and opportunities, an implementation program. Both the regional plan and the CEDS include implementation programming identifying strategies and actions aimed at realizing the regions vision. Each plan also provides a tabled "Report of Accomplishments" that is designed to track the regional activity, how it aligns with community priorities, which agency is responsible for the goal's implementation, identifies funding sources, and estimates its completion.

## PLAN EVALUATION AND SCORE

The CSRA-RC score is 44 out of 50. The agency created a clear table of regional priorities with activities needed to be completed in order to meet the identified priority. The table below identifies the activity, a loose implementation timeline, and the party responsible for completing the action. The plan does not identify anticipated costs or potential funding sources for these actions, and the commission does not currently have an

CSRA-RC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	5
Goals (1-5)	4
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	4
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	4
Internal Consistency (1-5)	5
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	4
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>44</b>

TABLE 10. CSRA'S SCORECARD

annual update or plan to check on the status of each of the listed goals and action items. Overall, the CSRA-RC plan is effective in that it goes in to great detail on the status of the region, but it does not have a clear check-in plan nor has it identified funding opportunities that would the communities it serves meet their goals.

Table A-1: Action Plan Work Program			
Activity		Implementation Timeline*	Responsible Party
<b>TOPIC: TARGETED SECTORS (MANUFACTURING)</b>			
<b>Goal:</b> Target business recruitment which enhances economic development with a focus on value-added and niche manufacturing.			
<b>A.</b>	Develop mid-size and large regional industrial parks	Ongoing	City/county governments; Development Authorities
<b>B.</b>	Target available financial resources to value-added and niche manufacturing.	Ongoing	City/county governments; Development Authorities
<b>C.</b>	Enhance labor force skills by guiding technical and occupational training in cooperation with technical schools and area colleges.	Ongoing	Development Authorities; area colleges
<b>D.</b>	Survey hi-tech and niche manufacturers about skills needs.	Ongoing	Development Authorities
<b>E.</b>	Promote designated areas in or near cities for niche and value added manufacturing.	Ongoing	Development Authorities

TABLE 11. EXAMPLE OF CSRA-RC ACTION PLAN

## REGION 8 | RIVER VALLEY (RVRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The River Valley Regional Commission is managed by a council of three members per county. One member is a county representative, the second is a city representative, and the third is a non-public member. Most of the non-public members of the council are community and economic development professionals that serve in another capacity within the region. The agency is organized into three main groups. The general RVRC division works on economic

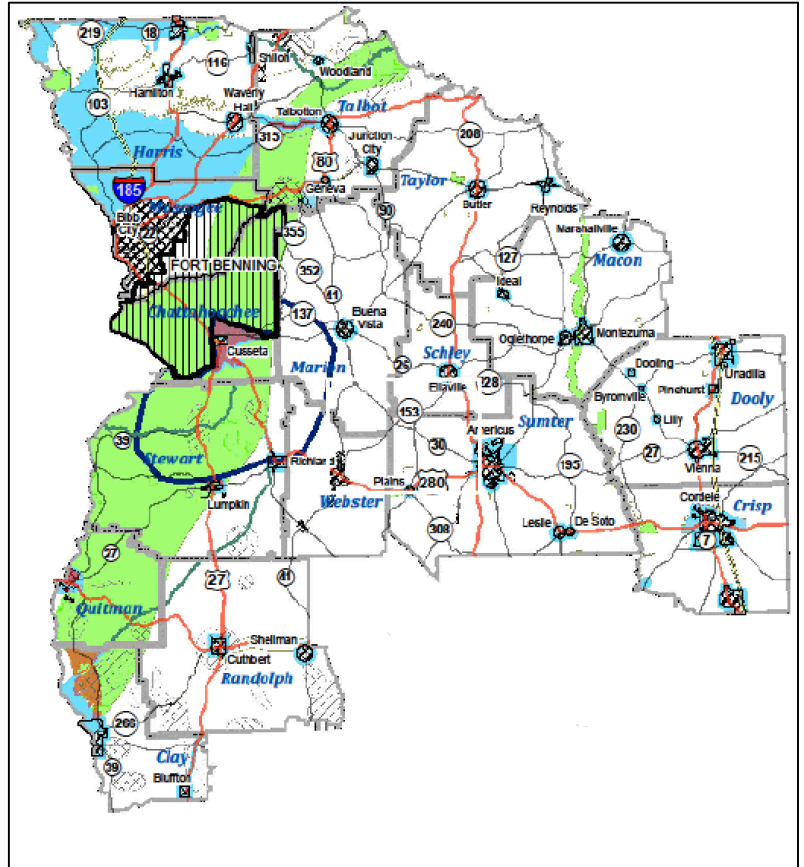


FIGURE 10. MAP OF RVRC

development, GIS and mapping services, historic preservation, planning and community development, and transportation planning. The second division is the Area Agency on Aging. The third division of RVRC is Workforce Innovation and works in close contact with the regional commission and more localized workforce centers located around the region.

### REGIONAL STATUS

As part of their community engagement strategy, Jim Livingston, RVRC's Community and Economic Development Executive Director, states that "an online survey garnered over 250

responses that were reviewed and analyzed by geographic area in four different ways to ensure that regional differences were respected and incorporated into the final CEDS. The survey revealed different priorities in the urban core (Columbus), Rural Centers (Cordele and Americus), and rural areas and the CEDS clearly notes these various preferences and needs across localities.” (NADO, 2019). For the comprehensive plan, regional cooperation is a vital component to effectively execute and implement a number of strategies that are beneficial to the region as a whole. According to the plan, economic growth is hindered due to education levels that lag far behind those of the state and nation; and an undereducated workforce that, in general, is unprepared for skilled and higher-paying jobs. As part of the CEDS, the agency has developed action items. According to Livingston, “out most successful efforts to go from plan to implementation has been a desire to help further rural broadband in the region. This matches federal and state investments and we fully intend to work regionally to continue to implement our initiatives. First amongst them is a demand-based survey tool to help quantify our time and see where our residents within the region are getting online and what they are doing there. This will ultimately help drive the quest for investment and show a willingness to pay for it. We believe this survey process, as identified in our CEDS, is very timely and will greatly benefit the region” (Livingston, 2019).

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The River Valley Regional Commission CEDS was recognized by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) for using ESRI’s story maps. “Because our CEDS was delivered exclusively online, we incorporated interactive maps and videos throughout the

document. We were able to prominently embed the NADO resilience video which is a succinct articulation of both economic and natural disaster resilience. We also highlighted examples of disasters the region has experienced in the past as a reminder that these disasters can happen anywhere and anytime, but that we can recover from them with planning and preparation” (Livingston, 2019). Being easily accessible online allows for a greater use of supportive images and an easier explanation of community development goals. The comprehensive plan is organized by DCA required plan elements, and the document lists out individual issues and opportunities supported by data. The RVRC plan stands out because of the issues identified in the plan is intergovernmental coordination. Many plans briefly mention the difficulty of navigating federal, state, county, and city policies.

#### IS THIS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN?

The RVRC scored 47 out of 50 points, particularly because of their organization and presentation of planning materials. The RVRC is effective because it uses maps and images of the region to clearly describe the existing conditions while listing regional priorities and actions needed to address those priority objectives. While the commission has created clear objectives, it has failed to clearly list partnerships and inter-organizational coordination that are needed to complete an action item, possible funding opportunities, and the overall estimated cost.

RVRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	5
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	4
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	4
Internal Consistency (1-5)	5
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	5
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	3
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>45</b>

TABLE 12. RVRC'S SCORECARD



Key Action	Priority	Cost Estimate	Time to Complete
<b>Objective: Assist the region in sustaining and improving quality of life</b>			
Provide sources of best practices for quality of life issues		\$	
Implement Code Enforcement in all of the region		\$\$	
Create and enhance spaces that are high in quality and are people oriented attractions		\$\$\$	
Address transportation issues for all residents of the region		\$\$	
Improve under utilized properties and work to eradicate blight in the region		\$\$\$	
Promote vibrant and attractive corridors with beautiful gateways		\$\$	
Implement where appropriate the Complete Streets program		\$\$	
Develop a litter reduction program		\$	
Increase the number of bike, hiking, and water trails in the region		\$\$	

TABLE 13. SAMPLE OF RVRC'S ACTION PLAN

## REGION 9 | HEART OF GEORGIA ALTAMAHA (HOGARC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission serves a 17-county region in south central and southeast Georgia and is governed by a council of four members per county. One member is a county representative, one member is a city representative, and the last two members are non-public representatives interested in community development. The agency is organized by the following services: the area agency on aging, GIS, planning and governmental services, and workforce development.



FIGURE 11. HOGA-RC MAP

### REGIONAL STATUS

Altamaha's economic development is significantly lower than that of the state of Georgia's 14.4% projected growth. Unfortunately, the population growth does not match the growth of the labor force following the 2007 recession. The HOGA region has traditionally relied on farming and forestry, but the latter part of the 20th Century shifted opportunities to production, services and transportation. As a result, growth has been slow as the region's economy has transitioned to focus on light-industrial and advanced-technology manufacturing. The 2007 recession was particularly detrimental to the region as unemployment rose sharply, as high as 13.2 in 2011, while the labor force dropped nearly 15% by 2015 (HOGARC, 2018). Many of the identified issues within the region relate to an increasing need for intergovernmental



cooperation. The plan also identifies a need for public and political support for coordinated land management strategies.

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Both the comprehensive plan and the CEDS document outline guiding principles for each DCA plan elements, and performance standards are in place to monitor the strategies designed for both the regional commission and local partners. In the CEDS document, HOGARC has very general job growth and private sector investment goals. The appendices of both planning documents provide a clear list of tasks to be completed by both the agency and their local partners. The regional commission is tasked with a strong advocacy role within the community, and many of their action items are in a supportive and educating capacity within local communities.

#### IS THIS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN?

With a score of 44 out of 55 points, the HOGARC plan lists broad goals and objectives for the region, but the action plan is written from the perspective of the agency as a consultant, not as an enabler nor as a community organizer. The plan goes into greater detail by county, listing strategic projects, programs, and activities.

HOGARC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	4
Goals (1-5)	4
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	5
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	4
Internal Consistency (1-5)	5
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	4
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
Total Score (out of 50)	44

TABLE 14. HOGARC'S SCORECARD

BLECKLEY COUNTY						
Program	Year to Complete	City/County	Estimated Cost	Funding Agency	Est. Private Investment	Est. # Jobs Created/Retained
Pursue GRAD designated industrial site	2020	Bleckley County City of Cochran	\$100,000/yr	OneGA USDA Local	\$1 M	50
Widen U.S. 23	2020	Bleckley County	\$33.6 M	DOT Federal	o	o
New industrial park improvements	2020	Bleckley County City of Cochran	\$5 M	OneGA USDA Local	o	50
Airport improvements	2018	City of Cochran	\$4 M	DOT OneGA Local	\$2M	50
Develop, improve, market old industrial park	2019	Bleckley County	\$1 M	OneGA USDA Local	o	25
Improvements at the I-16 / GA 112 interchange	2021	Bleckley County City of Cochran	\$10 M	Local DOT Federal	o	o

TABLE 15. EXAMPLE OF HOGA-RC PLANNING PRIORITIES BY COUNTY

While the plan doesn't include a schedule to check on the status of the projects, it provides an anticipated completion date. The plan also provides something unique to other plans: an estimation of jobs created or retained by the implemented action item. This is an interesting metric to include in the action plan, but the plan does not provide clear evaluation and performance measures to actually test the strategic project's objective.

## REGION 10 | SOUTHWEST GEORGIA (SWGRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Southwest Georgia Regional Commission council is comprised of a county representative, a city representative, and at least one nonpublic representative from each county in its jurisdiction. Many counties have several nonpublic members sitting on the council. Local farmers and business leaders make up the majority of nonpublic members, and many have previously been elected to

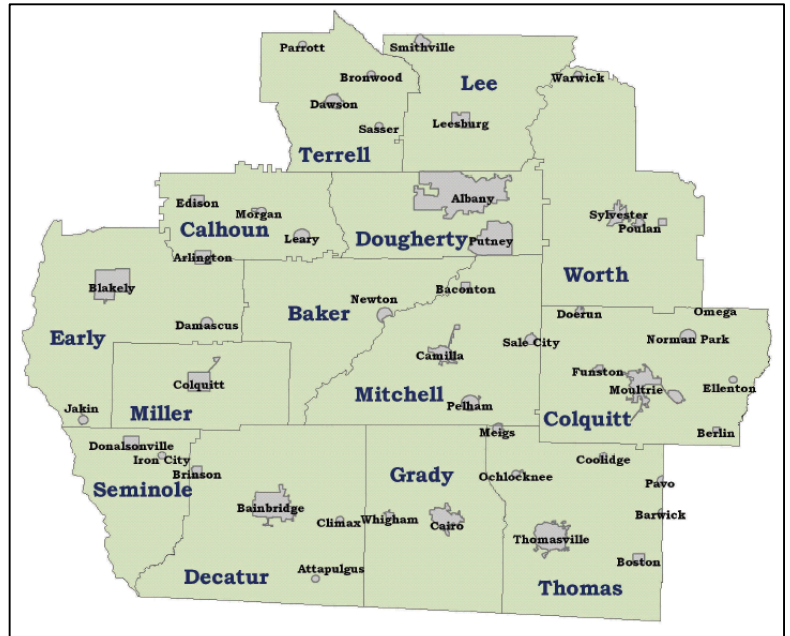


FIGURE 12. MAP OF SWGRC

a local government office. SWGRC has a considerably smaller staff than any other regional commission in the state. The regional commission's resources are dedicated to planning efforts, GIS services, and a regional transit system that operates seventy-six vehicles in thirteen counties in southwest Georgia to provide rural public and human services transportation (SWGRC, 2019). This is the only regional commission that offers this type of service directly to its community.

### REGIONAL STATUS

Like much of predominantly rural South Georgia, Southwest GA is experiencing considerable population decline and blight. While parts of Northeast Georgia have been able to reinvigorate their downtown cores, the Southwest has been unable to see a growth of the

services industry. According to SWGRC Executive Director Robert McDaniel, some local leaders have advocated for a change in blue laws, but voters have been hesitant to change current alcohol restrictions that could potentially bring restaurants into historic downtowns and create new active social spaces. Regional industry is dominated by agribusiness, and citizens would like to see more agribusiness. Local business owner Will Harris of White Oak Pastures in Bluffton has been able to revitalize his 6th generation farm from traditional agricultural practice to an organic farm that now hosts tours, a small bed and breakfast, and a store that sells locally grown produce and meats. Because this region is predominantly agricultural, local industry is driven by weather events, and over the last several years, crops have been severely damaged by hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding. With the U.S. Department of Energy's tax incentive program, SunShot initiative, many farmers are venturing into the solar energy industry in order to diversify their land's ability to profit. One of the issues that McDaniel identified is that there is a communication and education breakdown in many of the SWGRC's small towns, particularly related to new home construction and the development process. In small, rural communities, there is a "capability to introduce new industry, but they [the community] only want to build single family residential, and the price to build the home, buy the land, build the sewerage connections – there's a communication breakdown, and there's a need for third party content developers to explain this issue and how they [the community] can redevelop and meet the housing need" (McDaniel, 2019).

## PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The SWGRC plan provides a snapshot of the region, but no implementation strategies that address community-wide issues. The CEDS document does list out goals, opportunities, and strategies for each county, but the regional commission is taking on a somewhat passive role in their implementation procedures. Much of their capacity is to act in a supportive role to the county or city implementing programming changes. The CEDS also identifies a need to educate the community about the regional commission's planning process and the issues identified through the community engagement process.

### IS THIS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN?

With a score of 36 out of 50 points, the SWGRC plan provides a very loose action plan, with a simple list of goals for the region. The plan is inconsistent in identifying partners to work with to meet these goals, and only a few priorities include information on project cost and possible funding mechanisms. This is not a very effective plan because there is no schedule to check on these priorities, and the regional commission is acting solely as a

SWGRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	3
Goals (1-5)	3
Fact Base (1-5)	4
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	3
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	3
Internal Consistency (1-5)	3
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	4
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>36</b>

TABLE 16. SWGRC'S SCORECARD

consultant, doing very little to enable these regional changes. The goals listed are very loose ideas of what the region wants to accomplish, but the plan fails to identify how these priorities will fully be addressed. Some partnerships are listed, but without a plan to monitor these changes, it is difficult to measure how effective these programming goals are to the region.

Goal Types SWGRC	Does the plan identify partners?	Does the plan set a time limit?	Are the performance measures clearly identified?	Does the plan identify funding mechanisms or estimated costs?
Encourage and increase regional collaboration among cities and counties	Yes	No	No	No
Expand existing industries	Yes	No	Yes	No
Improve the infrastructure of water, sewer, roads, housing and technology.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Support technical colleges within the region.	Yes	No	Yes	No
Increase tourism in the region.	Yes	No	No	No
Recruit retirees to the region.	Yes	No	No	No
Increase access to capital for small businesses in the region.	Yes	No	No	No
Create a diverse economy resistant to economic recession.	Yes	No	No	No
Improve and upgrade the educational attainment levels of the labor workforce skills within the region.	Yes	No	No	No
Provide a well trained workforce, professional, technical and skilled, capable of accommodating new industry and maintaining existing industry.	Yes	No	Yes	No

TABLE 17. BROAD PRIORITIES OF SWGRC

## REGION 11 | SOUTHERN GEORGIA (SGRC)

### WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission council consists of three members from each county within the region and state appointees. Many non-public members represent other regional economic development agencies, post-secondary education

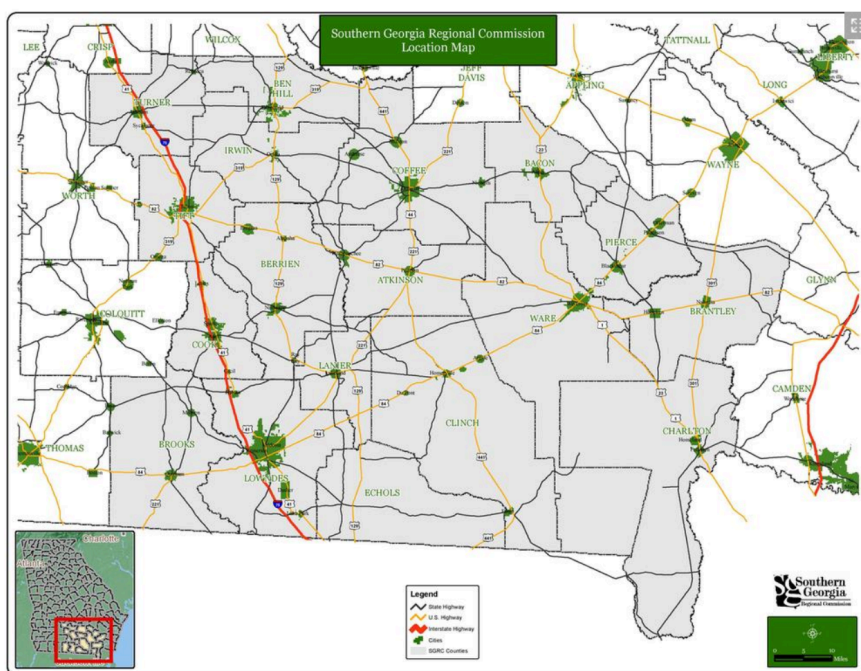


FIGURE 13. MAP OF SGRC

representatives, and workforce development professionals. The organization provides a wide variety of support, with departments that specialize in lending, information technology, community and economic development, local government services, transportation and environmental services, workforce development, an area agency on aging, and GIS.

### REGIONAL STATUS

The SGRC covers South Central to Southeast Georgia, and industry is dominated by agriculture and commercial timber production. The MSA in the region is Valdosta, which has a growing manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution base. Valdosta is also home to Moody Air Force Base and Valdosta State University. Many of the region's community and economic development initiatives support wither the air force base or environmental tourism. Home to the Okefenokee Swamp, and several other national wildlife sanctuaries, both the comprehensive

plan and CEDS document identifies ecological and agri-tourism as an under-performing industry for the region (SGRC, 2018). One of the largest needs in the region is additional funding to help build economic resilience. The plan has two types of initiatives to address resilience, the first being steady-state initiatives that engage in workforce development strategies that strengthen existing industries. The second type of planning initiative is called a “responsive initiative,” and it focuses on pre-disaster recovery efforts, defining responsibilities for multiple government agencies in response to major weather events.

#### PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The SGRC CEDS document is organized by the DCA’s required planning elements, with each topic organized by goals, objectives, strategies, and metrics to measure the success of the region meeting the previously identified goals. The CEDS is clearly organized, with very helpful visual aids and simple language that explain the state of the region and how community and community development operations can help strengthen local communities.

#### IS THIS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN?

With a score of 45 out of 50 points, the SGRC’s action plan is effective because the agency undergoes annual updates to check on the status of priority projects, making it a very effective planning document. The commission has created minimum performance standards and excellence standards, and have organized regional priorities by economic development, natural and cultural resources, community facilities and services, housing, land use, transportation,

SGRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	4
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	4
Implementation (1-5)	5
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	5
Internal Consistency (1-5)	4
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	4
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	4
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>45</b>

TABLE 18. SGRC’S SCORECARD



intergovernmental coordination, education, and senior services and aging. Each key planning topic lists several action items that help to improve these regional priorities. One unique component of the action plan is that the agency has identified a metric for local government performance, with a list of priorities for city and county officials. Examples of those performance standards are 1) to ensure that all elected city and county officials have the proper state certifications, and that they obtain their certifications through UGA's Carl Vinson Institute or an equivalent certification program, 2) update pre-disaster mitigation plans, and 3) upgrade all electronic communication capabilities for electronic communication between all local governments and furnish appropriate training the in the use. These are just a few samples of items from the Local Government Performance Standards Report, and the agency updates it annually, sharing which cities and counties have met these performance standards and which county is in the process of addressing these standards. The planning document also organized general planning action

items lists partnerships, funding needs, how the action item address the issues identified in the comprehensive planning process, and the status of completing the priority.

**Report of Accomplishments (as of FY2018)**

ACTIVITY	P&C or R	EST. ANNUAL COST	FUNDING SOURCES	ISSUE/ OPP. ADDRESSED	TIMEFRAME						STATUS
					2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT											
Collaborate on the creation of Digital Economy Incubators – request by regional leaders	P&C	Staff Time \$35,000	DCA, Local Governments	ED: I-1, I-5, I-6, O1-5, O-6				x			Ongoing
Transportation Planning to Support Economic Development: An Exploratory Study of Competitive Industry Clusters and Transportation	P&C	Staff Time \$150,000	DCA, MPO, local governments	ED: I-1, I-5, I-6, O1-5, O-6		x					Discontinued due to lack of funds
Develop a Moody Air Force Base Cooperation plan on encroachment – request by regional leaders	P&C	Staff Time \$20,000	DCA, Local Governments , EDA, MPO	ED: I-1, O-1, O-4, O-5 NC: O-3, O-4, I-3, I-5; IC: I-3 E: O-1, O-2, O-3		x	x				Completed
GIS Inventory of infrastructure in the region such as water, sewer, natural gas, and broadband – request by regional leaders	P&C	Staff Time \$30,000	DCA, EDA	I-3, I-5	x	x	x	x	x	x	Ongoing as funds become available
Provide Grants Writing Assistance to local Government for grants that promote economic development	P&C R	Staff Time \$5,000 each	DCA, Local Governments , EDA	ED: I-5, I-6 LU: O-1, O-7	x	x	x	x	x	x	Completed
Review/Write Economic Development Elements for local government comprehensive plan updates: Brooks, Bacon and Pierce Counties and their Cities	P&C R	Staff Time \$5,000/element	DCA/ Local Governments	ED: I-5 LU: O-1 E: I-1	x	x					Completed

**TABLE 19. EXAMPLE OF SGRC'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

## REGION 12 | COASTAL (CRC)

## WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Coastal Regional Commission council composition is very similar to all other state RC councils, and the CRC is very clear on who serves and for how long. “The Chairman (or their elected designee) of each county commission in the region shall serve for a period of time concurrent with their elected office. The Mayor (or their elected designee) from the largest municipality (population) in each county in the region shall serve for a period of time concurrent with their term of elected office” (CRC Website, 2019). For non-public appointees, “in order to meet the requirement of various federal agencies that require nonpublic participation, there shall be a minimum of thirty-five percent (35%) non-public representatives from the private sector, chambers, post-secondary education institutions,



FIGURE 14. MAP OF CRC

workforce development or labor groups. There will be one (1) non-public representative per county for a term of one (1) year and may be reappointed” (CRC Website, 2019). The CRC organization offers a wide array of services to its 10-county region including administrative services, an area agency on aging, economic development, financial services, information technology, planning and government services, and transportation services.

#### REGIONAL STATUS

Because of the Coastal Regional Commission’s geographic status in the state, much of the area’s planning initiatives are to protect and preserve its ecological resources. Like many other regions of Georgia, the region lacks sufficient economic opportunities for local residents, and faces competition with South Carolina and Florida to attract desirable business opportunities. Much of the region’s plan, as well as local planning opportunities identify the Savannah Port as “a major advantage for manufacturing and distribution” (CRC CEDS, 2017). Much of the region’s economic development is tied to tourism through the CRC’s “coastal waterways and the natural, historic, and cultural resources (CRC CEDS, 2017), but the area is experiencing population decline. Approximately 22.3 percent of the primary jobs within region are held by outside commuters, and 22.2 percent of employed Coastal Georgia residents leave the region for employment, a relatively high percentage compared to workforce investment areas around the state. Both the CEDS and Regional Assessment Plan outline funding opportunities for the regional commission and local governments to capitalize on. Each plan also identifies a need for intergovernmental coordination between agencies to ensure that Georgia’s Coastal region can remain competitive with neighboring states while supporting the existing community.

## PLAN ELEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The CRC has an interesting assessment plan because they have partnered with groups like the University of Georgia's College of Environment and Design Master's Program in Environmental Planning and Design, Georgia State University students that specialize in collecting and mapping data in GIS, Savannah State University, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Over a period of several years, multiple university planning studios have worked in the region, researching and developing design plans that best suit the Coastal environment's needs. As part of their discovery and recommendations, students identified areas within the region that require special attention, and programming alternatives that help these individual communities address these needs. Much of the regional assessment includes natural hazard information and contingency plans for local governments to enact when faced with natural disasters. As part of the CEDS documentation, the regional commission included an in-depth list of programs, identified responsible parties for program implementation, and a performance evaluation schedule to ensure that the economic development strategy is implemented in a timely manner.

### IS THIS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN?

With a score of 50 out of 50 points, the CRC has a very effective plan because it bridges the environmental concerns of the region with local economic development opportunities. It is one of the most in-depth plans across the state, and provides excellent images, clear maps, and data that clearly communicates the state of the region. The plan first lists economic weaknesses

CRC	Score
Issue Identification and Vision (1-5)	5
Goals (1-5)	5
Fact Base (1-5)	5
Policies (1-5)	5
Implementation (1-5)	5
Monitoring and Evaluation (1-5)	5
Internal Consistency (1-5)	5
Organization and Presentation (1-5)	5
Inter-organizational coordination (1-5)	5
Compliance (1-5)	5
<b>Total Score (out of 50)</b>	<b>50</b>

TABLE 20. CRC'S SCORECARD

for the region, then planners created a “Strategy and Action Plan” that address workforce, infrastructure, manufacturing, global competitiveness, funding resources, public safety, and environmental resiliency. This is the first plan outside of Atlanta to address the region’s position in the global economy and how the agency can leverage the region’s assets into a more competitive strategy that continues to build on the regions manufacturing sector. The plan then identifies resources, tools, and financing that is needed to implement these planning strategies. Authors of the plan go into great detail explaining possible implementation partners at the local, state, and federal level. The plan includes an evaluation sheet to be updated semi-annually that lists work programs, the schedule for evaluation, the responsible party, and the time frame for the project. The plan does not go into detail on available funds, but simply lists possible partnerships that could develop funding.

## CONCLUSION

Georgia is a diverse state, and its many opportunities are characterized by the planning efforts of each regional commission. Most regions must balance the needs of a relatively large rural area that contains one or two larger metropolitan areas, and many neighboring jurisdictions are unwilling to work together to consolidate resources for improved funding and development opportunities. Every region has an action or implementation plan that addresses regional and local issues, but through this evaluation process, it is evident as to which agencies use their resources to build greater outcomes for the communities they serve.

	Interactive (contingency)	Proactive (strategic)	Preactive (recruitment)	Reactive (impact)	Inter- Regional Cooperation	The Professional Role of the Agency (consultant, enabler, or community organizer)
Northwest GA		X		X		consultant
Georgia Mountains		X	X		X	consultant and community organizer
Atlanta	X	X	X	X	X	consultant, enabler, and community organizer
Southern GA		X		X		consultant
Middle GA		X		X		consultant
Heart of GA Altamaha		X		X		consultant
Coastal	X	X	X	X	X	consultant, enabler, and community organizer
Central Savannah River		X				consultant
River Valley	X	X	X			consultant, enabler, and community organizer
Three Rivers		X				consultant
Northeast GA	X	X	X			consultant and enabler
Southwest GA	X	X				consultant

TABLE 21. TYPES OF PLANNING BY REGIONAL COMMISSION

The above table is a summary of planning approaches used by each of the 12 regional commissions and the professional role of the agency to the region it serves. The best plans appear to be the ones that have the ability to unite their local governments in pursuit of shared regional planning goals. One planning topic that sets regional commissions apart from each other is the identification of where it, as a region, fits in the global economy, and how regional planning

efforts can have a larger impact on industry development.

“Communities need to learn about the external economic forces shaping them and work to position themselves to take advantage of opportunities and to avoid external threats. They must be entrepreneurial in seizing opportunities, cutting losses, investing in strategic programs, and leveraging their assets to compete in the New Economy” (Leigh and Blakely, 2017). In this case, the ARC and CRC are the only plans that identify a need to address

RC	Total Score (out of 50)
ARC	50
CRC	50
RVRC	45
NEGRC	45
SGRC	45
GMRC	44
CSRA-RC	44
HOGARC	44
TRRC	37
MGRC	37
SWGRC	36
NWGRC	33

TABLE 22. ALL SCORES

economic development issues at a global scale, and provide

an action plan to help local governments become more competitive. The scores listed in Table 22 show how the regional commissions compare to each other. The highest scoring plans are from the Atlanta Regional Commission and the Coastal Regional Commission. Both are regions that have relatively high population rates compared to many other parts of the state, and their plans encompass all of Berke’s and Godschalk’s internal and external characteristics. The lowest scoring plans, with scores in the 30’s, all need similar organizational improvements in developing an implementation plan to ensure that the goals set by each respective agency are met in a timely manner. Even though the scores of the TRRC, MGRC, SWGRC, and NWGRC are not as high as other regional commissions, each agency offers invaluable services to the diverse communities they serve.

Georgia Power economic developers, and former Georgia Tech MCRP students, Marion Phillips and Sarah Carnes think that one of the biggest issues for Georgia’s regional commissions

for the next few decades is “going to be how you merge all of these different communities together. As Metro Atlanta continues to grow and remain the powerhouse of the state, and the entire Southeast region, how do you make sure you’re not leaving the other communities behind. The new question becomes ‘how do you get them to buy-in to being involved?’” (Carnes, 2019). Phillips identified one of the barriers to developing buy-in as being the voluntary nature of the regional commissions. “The communities themselves have to come to the table and be willing to work with their surrounding communities, and besides joint development authorities, there really is no incentive or platform to work and think regionally” (Phillips, 2019). Because of Georgia’s Home rule status, the plans and strategies created by regional commissions are unenforceable. The Atlanta Regional Commission’s federal status as an MPO allows it to create programming measures and distribute funding for smaller municipalities, and many regional commissions across the state would benefit from a similar status. However, this unlikely to ever change in much of rural Georgia, because local governments would refuse to give up any sort of power, even if additional funding was to be offered as an incentive. The ARC’s position as an MPO has allowed it to create the Livable Centers Initiative (LCI), a grant program that provides funding for smaller areas to develop new community links through sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure.

The state is in the process of helping to build private support. One economic development initiative passed in the 2018 legislative session is House Bill 336, the “Broadband Strategy for All of Georgia Act.” As identified in every regional commission planning document, many planners and commission councils believe that broadband access in rural communities will allow them to compete at a greater scale with their more urban counterparts. The Broadband Strategy for All is meant to provide reporting guidance for “achieving enhanced broadband deployment



throughout the state” and subsidies will go to internet providers to build internet lines in rural communities (HB 336, 2018). As of 2019, there is no state funding allocated to the project.

When asked about the biggest changes in regional planning and development over the last 30 years, all that were interviewed identified the growing willingness for cities and counties to work together to combine resources, but there appears to be a lack of a steady information flow region-to-region. The DCA acts as the figurehead for planning efforts, and many regions look directly to them for guidance, instead of looking to see how their neighbor is addressing the same planning strategies. State-wide and national agencies are in place, like the National Association of Development Associations, the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions, and the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), to help bring community and economic development officials together in a regional capacity. Many counties in the state have either created or joined a neighboring development authority. These are much smaller coalitions of counties that combine resources to fundraise, apply for grants, and pool resources. Because a single county development authority (DA), or joint development authority (JDA), is a legislative authority, and not a constitutional authority, they are in place to attract investment into the community as an extension of the county government. County commissions allocate funding for development authorities, and they are able to act in both a local and regional capacity for economic development programming.

Regional commissions are an important aspect of Georgia’s community and economic development practices, because they have ability to leverage state goals with local priorities in order to improve the quality of life for citizens. “Social and economic inequalities are growing,

cities are changing in character and complexion, and the nation is in the midst of another significant demographic transition. [...] Declining federal support for traditional urban community development has created an environment in which equity planners must learn to collaborate with other stakeholders and activists” (Reece, 2018). A regional commission’s ability to gather a mix of community stakeholders together to then identify goals and create implementation strategies is necessary for holding small governments accountable to the development decisions they make. Regional commissions provide valuable supportive services to rural communities, and many would not be able to meet the DCA’s planning requirements without the help of their RC. Though the system has its gaps, education and advocacy on behalf of regional commissions is needed, because they are a valuable public resource that has the ability to improve the quality of life for all Georgians.

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